MUNSEY

JUL 17 1922

THE MAN HUNT

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

SHOULD A WOMAN SHIELD HER FUGITIVE SWEETHEART

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THE RAINBOW CHASER

BY GEORGE F. WORTS

BUSINESS, BEAUTY, AND BRAINS IN THIS COMPLETE NOVELETTE

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:: AND FOUR SERIALS ::

AUGUST

PRICE 25 CENTS

The Girl from Hollywood

A MODERN DRAMA OF CITY AND COUNTRY LIFE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

Author of "Tarzan of the Apes," "A Princess of Mars," etc.

IN the foothills of the southern California mountains are the Rancho del Ganado, owned by Colonel Pennington, a Virginian of wealth and good family, and a smaller ranch on which Mrs. Evans, a widow, lives with her daughter Grace and her son Guy. Custer Pennington, the colonel's son, is engaged to Grace Evans, but the girl feels that she has dramatic talent, and before settling down to married life in the country she decides to go to Hollywood and make a bid for fame as a motion picture actress.

There is also a boy and girl engagement between Eva Pennington, Custer's sister, and Guy Evans. In his eagerness for money to enable him to marry, young Evans becomes involved in the schemes of Slick Allen, a discharged employee of the Ganado ranch, who is selling whisky stolen from a government warehouse. The liquor is hidden in the hills, and every Friday night thirty-six cases are brought down by a burro train to a barn on the Evans ranch, from which they are shipped to Los Angeles concealed in a truck load of hay.

Another neighbor of the Penningtons is Mrs. Burke, whose daughter Shannon, known professionally as Gaza de Lure, is in Hollywood, playing small parts in film dramas. A clever and beautiful girl, Shannon Burke attracts the attention of Wilson Crumb, an actor-director of some prominence, who tricks her into the morphine habit. Crumb is also a partner of Slick Allen, to whom he owes several thousand dollars received for drugs. To avoid paying the debt, he treacherously informs on Allen, who is arrested and imprisoned as a drug peddler.

Summoned to her mother's bedside owing to Mrs. Burke's serious illness, Shannon takes with her a week's supply of morphine. Her mother is dead when she arrives, and the hospitable Penningtons take the grief-stricken girl into their home. Here, impressed by the beauty of the life led by her hosts, she battles desperately, but with little hope of success, against the terrible habit she has formed.

XV

DURING the hour following breakfast that morning, while Shannon was alone in her rooms, the craving returned. The thought of it turned her sick when she felt it coming. She had been occupying herself making her bed and tidying the room, as she had done each morning since her arrival; but when that was done, her thoughts reverted by habit to the desire that had so fatally mastered her.

While she was riding, she had had no opportunity to think of anything but the thrill of the new adventure. At breakfast she had been very hungry, for the first time in many months; and this new appetite for food, and the gay conversation of the breakfast table, had given her nerves no chance to assert their craving. Now that she was alone and unoccupied, the terrible thing clutched at her again.

Once again she fought the fight that she had fought so many times of late—the fight that she knew she was ordained to lose before she started fighting. She longed to win it so earnestly that her defeat was the more pitiable. She was eager to prolong this new-found happiness to the uttermost limit. Though she knew that it must end when her supply of morphine was gone, she was determined to gain a few hours each day, in order that she might add at least another happy day to her life. Again she took but half her ordinary allowance; but with what anguished humiliation she performed the hated and repulsive act! Always had she loathed the habit, but never had it seemed nearly so disgusting as when performed amid these cleanly and beautiful surroundings, under the same roof with such people as the Penningtons.

There crept into her mind a thought that had found its way there more than once

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before during the past two years—the thought of self-destruction. She put it away from her; but in the depth of her soul she knew that never before had it taken so strong a hold upon her. Her mother, her only tie, was gone, and no one would care. She had looked into heaven and found that it was not for her. She had no future except to return to the hideous existence of the Hollywood bungalow and her lonely boarding house, and to the hated Crumb.

It was then that Eva Pennington called her.

"I am going to walk up to the Berkshires," she said. "Come along with me!"

"The Berkshires!" exclaimed Shannon. "I thought they were in New England."

She was descending the stairs toward Eva, who stood at the foot, holding open the door that led into the patio. She welcomed the interruption that had broken in upon her morbid thoughts. The sight of the winsome figure smiling up at her dispelled them as the light of the sun sweeps away miasmatic vapors.

"In New England?" repeated Eva. Her brows puckered, and then suddenly she broke into a merry laugh. "I meant pigs, not hills!"

Shannon laughed, too. How many times she had laughed that day—and it was yet far from noon. Close as was the memory of her mother's death, she could laugh here with no consciousness of irreverence—rather, perhaps, with the conviction that she was best serving the ideals that had been dear to that mother by giving and accepting happiness when opportunity offered it.

"I'm only sorry it's not the hills," she said; "for that would mean walking, walking, walking—doing something in the open, away from people who live in cities and who can find no pleasures outside four walls."

Shannon's manner was tense, her voice had suddenly become serious. The younger girl looked up at her with an expression of mild surprise.

"My gracious!" cried Eva. "You're getting almost as bad as popsy, and you've been here only half a week; but how radiant, if you really love it!"

"I do love it, dear, though I didn't mean to be quite so tragic; but the thought that I shall have to go away and can never enjoy it again *is* tragic."

"I hope you won't have to go," said Eva simply, slipping an arm about the other's waist. "We all hope that you won't have to."

They walked down the hill, past the saddle horse barn, and along the graveled road that led to the upper end of the ranch. The summer sun beat hotly upon them, making each old sycamore and oak and walnut a delightful oasis of refreshing shade. In a field at their left two mowers were clicking merrily through lush alfalfa. At their right, beyond the pasture fence, gentle Guernseys lay in the shade of a wide-spreading sycamore, a part of the pastoral allegory of content that was the Rancho del Ganado; and over all were the blue California sky and the glorious sun.

"Isn't it wonderful?" breathed Shannon, half to herself. "It makes one feel that there cannot be a care or sorrow in all the world!"

They soon reached the pens and houses where sleek, black Berkshires dozed in every shaded spot. Then they wandered farther up the cañon, into the pasture where the great brood sows sprawled beneath the sycamores, or wallowed in a concrete pool shaded by overhanging boughs. Eva stooped now and then to stroke a long, deep side.

"How clean they are!" exclaimed Shannon. "I thought pigs were dirty."

"They are when they are kept in dirty places—the same as people."

"They don't smell badly; even the pens didn't smell of pig. All I noticed was a heavy, sweet odor. What was it—something they feed them?"

Eva laughed.

"It was the pigs themselves. The more you know pigs, the better you love 'em. They're radiant creatures!"

"You dear! You love everything, don't you?"

"Pretty nearly everything, except prunes and washing dishes."

They swung up then through the orange grove, and along the upper road back toward the house. It was noon and lunch time when they arrived. Shannon was hot and tired and dusty and delighted as she opened the door at the foot of the stairs that led up to her rooms.

There she paused. The old, gripping desire had seized her. She had not once felt it since she had passed through that door more than two hours before. For a mo-

ment she hesitated, and then, fearfully, she turned toward Eva.

"May I clean up in your room?" she asked.

There was a strange note of appeal in Shannon's voice that the other girl did not understand.

"Why, certainly," she said; "but is there anything the matter? You are not ill?"

"Just a little tired."

"There! I should never have walked you so far. I'm so sorry!"

"I want to be tired. I want to do it again this afternoon — all afternoon. I don't want to stop until I am ready to drop!" Then, seeing the surprise in Eva's expression, she added: "You see, I shall be here such a short time that I want to crowd every single moment full of pleasant memories."

Shannon thought that she had never eaten so much before as she had that morning at breakfast; but at luncheon she more than duplicated her past performance. There was cold chicken—delicious Rhode Island Reds raised on the ranch; there was a salad of home-grown tomatoes—firm, deep red beauties—and lettuce from the garden; Hannah's bread, with butter fresh from the churn, and tall, cool pitchers filled with rich Guernsey milk; and then a piece of Hannah's famous apple pie, with cream so thick that it would scarce pour.

"My!" Shannon exclaimed at last. "I have seen the pigs and I have become one."

"And I see something, dear," said Mrs. Pennington, smiling.

"What?"

"Some color in your cheeks."

"Not *really?*" she cried, delighted.

"Yes, really."

"And it's mighty becoming," offered the colonel. "Nothing like a brown skin and rosy cheeks for beauty. That's the way God meant girls to be, or He wouldn't have given 'em delicate skins and hung the sun up there to beautify 'em. Here He's gone to a lot of trouble to fit up the whole world as a beauty parlor, and what do women do? They go and find some stuffy little shop poked away where the sun never reaches it, and pay some other woman, who knows nothing about art, to paint a mean imitation of a complexion on their poor skins. They wouldn't think of hanging a chromo in their living rooms; but they wear one on their faces, when the greatest Artist of them all is ready and willing to paint a masterpiece there for nothing!"

"What a dapper little thought!" exclaimed Eva. "Popsy should have been a poet."

"Or an ad writer for a cosmetic manufacturer," suggested Custer. "Oh, by the way, not changing the subject or anything, but did you hear about Slick Allen?"

No, they had not. Shannon pricked up her ears, metaphorically. What did these people know of Slick Allen?

"He's just been sent up in L. A. for having narcotics in his possession. Got a year in the county jail."

"I guess he was a bad one," commented the colonel; "but he never struck me as being a drug addict."

"Nor me; but I guess you can't always tell them," said Custer.

"It must be a terrible habit," said Mrs. Pennington.

"It's about as low as any one can sink," said Custer.

"I hear that there's been a great increase in it since prohibition," remarked the colonel. "Personally, I'd have more respect for a whisky drunkard than for a drug addict; or perhaps I should better say that I'd feel less disrespect. A police official told me not long ago, at a dinner in town, that if drug-taking continues to increase as it has recently, it will constitute a national menace by comparison with which the whisky evil will seem paltry."

Shannon Burke was glad when they rose from the table, putting an end to the conversation. She had plumbed the uttermost depths of humiliation. She had felt herself go hot and cold in shame and fear. At first her one thought had been to get away—to find some excuse for leaving the Penningtons at once. If they knew the truth, what would they think of her? Not because of her habit alone, but because she had imposed upon their hospitality in the guise of decency, knowing that she was unclean, and practicing her horrid vice beneath their very roof; associating with their daughter and bringing them all in contact with her moral leprosy.

She was hastening to her room to pack. She knew there was an evening train for the city, and while she packed she could be framing some plausible excuse for leaving thus abruptly.

Custer Pennington called to her.

"Miss Burke!"

She turned, her hand upon the knob of the door to the upstairs suite.

"I'm going to ride over the back ranch this afternoon. Eva showed you the Berkshires this morning; now I want to show you the Herefords. I told the stableman to saddle Baldy for you. Will half an hour be too soon?"

He was standing in the north arcade of the patio, a few yards from her, waiting for her reply. How fine and straight and clean he was! If fate had been less unkind, she might have been worthy of the friendship of such a man as he.

Worthy? Was she unworthy, then? She had been just as fine and clean as Custer Pennington until a beast had tricked her into shame. She had not knowingly embraced a vice. It had already claimed her before she knew it for what it was. Must she then forego all hope of happiness because of a wrong of which she herself was innocent?

She wanted to go with Custer. Another day would make no difference, for the Penningtons would never know. How could they? By what chance might they ever connect Shannon Burke with Gaza de Lure? She well knew that her screen days were over, and there was no slightest likelihood that any of these people would be introduced into the bungalow on the Vista del Paso. Who could begrudge her just this little afternoon of happiness before she went back to Crumb?

"Don't tell me you don't want to come," cried Custer. "I won't take no for an answer!"

"Oh, but I do want to come—ever so much! I'll be down in just a minute. Why wait half an hour?"

She was in her room no more than five minutes, and during that time she sought bravely to efface all thought of the little black case; but with diabolic pertinacity it constantly obtruded itself, and with it came the gnawing hunger of nerves starving for a narcotic.

"I won't!" she cried, stamping her foot. "I won't! I won't!"

If only she could get away from the room before she succumbed to the mounting temptation, she was sure that she could fight it off for the rest of the afternoon. She had gained that much, at least; but she must keep occupied, constantly occupied, where she could not have access to it or see the black case in which she kept it.

She triumphed by running away from it. She almost hurled herself down the stairs and into the patio. Custer Pennington was not there. She must find him before the craving dragged her back to the rooms above. Already she could feel her will weakening. It was the old, old story that she knew so well.

"What's the use?" the voice of the tempter asked. "Just a little one! It will make you feel so much better. What's the use?"

She turned toward the door again; she had her hand upon the knob, and then she swung back and called him.

"Mr. Pennington!"

If he did not hear, she knew that she would go up into her rooms defeated.

"Coming!" he answered from beyond the arched entrance of the patio, and then he stepped into view.

She almost ran to him.

"Was I very long?" she asked. "Did I keep you waiting?"

"Why, you've scarcely been gone any time at all," he replied.

"Let's hurry," she said breathlessly. "I don't want to miss any of it!"

He wondered why she should be so much excited at the prospect of a ride into the hills, but it pleased him that she was, and it flattered him a little, too. He began to be a little enthusiastic over the trip, which he had planned only as part of the generous policy of the family to keep Shannon occupied, so that she might not brood too sorrowfully over her loss.

And Shannon was pleased because of her victory. She was too honest at heart to attempt to deceive herself into thinking that it was any great triumph; but even to have been strong enough to have run away from the enemy was something. She did not hope that it augured any permanent victory for the future, for she did not believe that such a thing was possible. She knew that scarce three in a hundred slaves of morphine definitely cast off their bonds this side the grave, and she had gone too far to be one of the three. If she could keep going forever as she had that day, she might do it; but that, of course, was impossible. There must be hours when she would be alone with nothing to do but think, think, think, and what would she think about? Always the same things—the little white powder and the peace and rest that it would give her.

Custer watched her as she mounted, holding Baldy beside the block for her, and again he was pleased to note that she did not neglect a single detail of the instructions he had given her.

"Some girl, this!" the young man soliloquized mentally.

He knew she must be at least a little lame and sore after the morning ride, but though he watched her face he saw no sign of it registered there.

"Game!"

He was going to like her. Stirrup to stirrup, they rode slowly up the lane toward the cañon road. Her form was perfect. She seemed to recall everything his father had told her, and she sat easily, with no stiffness.

"Don't you want to ride faster?" she asked. "You needn't poke along on my account."

"It's too hot," he replied; but the real reason was that he knew she was probably suffering, even at a walk.

For a long time they rode in silence, the girl taking in every beauty of meadow, ravine, and hill, that she might store them all away for the days when they would be only memories. The sun beat down upon them fiercely, for it was an early August day, and there was no relieving breeze; but she enjoyed it. It was all so different from any day in her past, and so much happier than anything in the last two years, or anything she could expect in the future.

Custer Pennington, never a talkative man, was always glad of a companionship that could endure long silences. Grace had been like that with him. They could be together for hours with scarce a dozen words exchanged; and yet both could talk well when they had anything to say. It was the knowledge that conversation was not essential to perfect understanding and comradeship that had rendered their intimacy delightful.

The riders had entered the hills and were winding up Jackknife Cañon before either spoke.

"If you tire," he said, "or if it gets too hot, we'll turn back. Please don't hesitate to tell me."

"It's heavenly!" she said.

"Possibly a few degrees too hot for heaven," he suggested; "but it's always cool under the live oaks. Any time you want to rest we'll stop for a bit."

"Which are the live oaks?" she asked.

He pointed to one.

"Why are they called *live* oaks?"

"They're evergreen — I suppose that's the reason. Here's a big old fellow—shall we stop?"

"And get off?"

"If you wish."

"Do you think I could get on again?" Pennington laughed.

"I'll get you up all right. Still feel a little lame?"

"Who said I was lame?" she demanded.

"I know you must be, but you're mighty game!"

"I was when I started, but not any more. I seem to have limbered up. Let's try it. I want to see if I can get on from the ground, as Eva does. What are you smiling at? That's the second time in the last few seconds."

"Was I smiling? I didn't know it. I didn't mean to."

"What did I do?"

"You didn't do anything—it was something you said. You won't mind, will you, as long as you are learning to ride a horse, if I teach you the correct terminology at the same time?"

"Why, of course not! What did I say? Was it very awful?"

"Oh, no; but it always amuses me when I hear it. It's about getting on and off. You get on or off a street car, but you mount or dismount if you're riding a horse."

"But I don't!" she exclaimed, laughing. "Falling on and off would suit my method better."

"No, you mount very nicely. Now watch, and I'll show you how to dismount. Put your left hand on the horn; throw your right leg over the cantle, immediately grasping the cantle with the right hand; stand erect in the left stirrup, legs straight and heels together — you see, I'm facing right across the horse. Now support the weight of the body with your arms, like this; remove the left foot from the stirrup and drop to the ground, alighting evenly on both feet. That's correct form and a good plan to follow while you're learning to ride. Afterward one gets to swinging off almost any old way."

"I thought one always *dismounted*," she suggested, "from a horse!"

Her eyes twinkled. He laughed.

"I'll have to be careful, won't I? You scored that time!"

"Now watch me," she said.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed, as she dropped lightly to the ground.

They led their horses beneath the spreading tree and sat down with their backs to the huge bole.

"How cool it is here!" remarked the girl. "I can feel a breeze, though I hadn't noticed one before."

"There always is a breeze beneath the oaks. I think they make their own. I read somewhere that an oak evaporates about one hundred and eighty gallons of water every day. That ought to make a considerable change of temperature beneath the tree on a hot day like this, and in that way it must start a circulation of air about it."

"How interesting! How much there is to know in the world, and how little of it most of us know! A tree is a tree, a flower is a flower, and the hills are the hills—that much knowledge of them satisfies nearly all of us. The how and the why of them we never consider; but I should like to know more. We should know all about things that are so beautiful—don't you think so?"

"Yes," he said. "In ranching we do learn a lot that city people don't need to know—about how things grow, and what some plants take out of the soil, and what others put into it. It's part of our business to know these things, not only that we may judge the food value of certain crops, but also to keep our soil in condition to grow good crops every year."

He told her how the tree beneath which they sat drew water and various salts from the soil, and how the leaves extracted carbon dioxide from the air, taking it in through myriads of minute mouths on the under sides of the leaves, and how the leaves manufactured starch and the sap carried it to every growing part of the tree, from deepest root to the tip of loftiest twig.

The girl listened, absorbed. As she listened she watched the man's face, earnest and intelligent, and mentally she could not but compare him and his conversation with the men she had known in the city, and their conversation. They had talked to her as if she was a mental cipher, incapable of understanding or appreciating anything worth while—small talk, that subverter of the ancient art of conversation. In a brief half hour Custer Pennington had taught her things that would help to make the world a little more interesting and a little more beautiful; for she could never look upon a tree again as just a tree—it would be for her a living, breathing, almost a sentient creature.

She tried to recall what she had learned from two years' association with Wilson Crumb, and the only thing she could think of was that Crumb had taught her to snuff cocaine.

After a while they started on again, and the girl surprised the man by mounting easily from the ground. She was very much pleased with her achievement, laughing happily at his word of approval.

They rode on until they found the Herefords. They counted them as they searched through the large pasture that ran back into the hills; and when the full number had been accounted for, they turned toward home. As he had told her about the trees, Custer told her also about the beautiful white-faced cattle, of their origin in the English county whose name they bear, and of their unequaled value as beef animals. He pointed out various prize winners as they passed them.

"There you are, smiling again," she said accusingly, as they followed the trail homeward. "What have I done now?"

"You haven't done anything but be very patient all afternoon. I was smiling at the idea of how thrilling the afternoon must have been for a city girl, accustomed, I suppose, to a constant round of pleasure and excitement!"

"I have never known a happier afternoon," she said.

"I wonder if you really mean that?"

"Honestly!"

"I am glad," he said; "for sometimes I get terribly tired of it here, and I think it always does me good to have an outsider enthuse a little. It brings me a realization of the things we have here that city people can't have, and makes me a little more contented."

"You couldn't be discontented! Why, there are just thousands and thousands of people in the city who would give everything to change places with you! We don't all live in the city because we want to. You are fortunate that you don't have to."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it."

"But it seems such a narrow life here! I ought to be doing a man's work among men, where it will count."

"You *are* doing a man's work here and living a man's life, and what you do here *does* count. Suppose you were making stoves, or selling automobiles or bonds, in the city. Would any such work count for more than all this—the wonderful swine and cattle and horses that you are raising? Your father has built a great business, and you are helping him to make it greater. Could you do anything in the city of which you could be half so proud? No, but in the city you might find a thousand things to do of which you might be terribly ashamed. If I were a man, I'd like your chance!"

"You're not consistent. You have the same chance, but you tell us that you are going back to the city. You have your grove here, and a home and a good living, and yet you want to return to the city you inveigh against."

"I do *not* want to," she declared.

"I hope you don't, then," Custer said simply.

They reached the house in time for a swim before dinner; but after dinner, when they started for the ballroom to dance, Shannon threw up her hands in surrender.

"I give up!" she cried laughingly. "I tried to be game to the finish, and I want ever so much to come and dance; but I don't believe I could even walk as far as the ballroom, much less dance after I got there. Why, I doubt whether I'll be able to get upstairs without crawling!"

"You poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Pennington. "We've nearly killed you, I know. We are all so used to the long rides and walking and swimming and dancing that we don't realize how they tire unaccustomed muscles. You go right to bed, my dear, and don't think of getting up for breakfast."

"Oh, but I want to get up and ride, if I may, and if Eva will wake me."

"She's got the real stuff in her," commented the colonel, after Shannon had bid them good night and gone to her rooms.

"I'll say she has," agreed Custer. "She's a peach of a girl!"

"She's simply divine," added Eva.

In her room, Shannon could barely get into bed before she was asleep.

XVI

It was four o'clock the following morning before she awoke. The craving awoke with her. It seized her mercilessly; yet even as she gave in to it, she had the satisfaction of knowing that she had gone without the little white powders longer this time than since she had first started to use them. She took but a third of her normal dose.

When Eva knocked at half past five, Shannon rose and dressed in frantic haste, that she might escape a return of the desire. She did not escape it entirely, but she was able to resist it until she was dressed and out of reach of the little black case.

That day she went with Custer and Eva and Guy to the country club, returning only in time for a swim before dinner; and again she fought off the craving while she was dressing for dinner. After dinner they danced, and once more she was so physically tired when she reached her rooms that she could think of nothing but sleep. The day of golf had kept her fully occupied in the hot sun, and in such good company her mind had been pleasantly occupied, too, so that she had not been troubled by her old enemy.

Again it was early morning before she was forced to fight the implacable foe. She fought valiantly this time, but she lost.

And so it went, day after day, as she dragged out her dwindling supply and prolonged the happy hours of her all too brief respite from the degradation of the life to which she knew she must soon return. Each day it was harder to think of going back—of leaving these people, whom she had come to love as she loved their lives and their surroundings, and taking her place again in the stifling and degraded atmosphere of the Vista del Paso bungalow. They were so good to her, and had so wholly taken her into their family life, that she felt as one of them. They shared everything with her. There was not a day that she did not ride with Custer out among the brown hills. She knew that she was going to miss these rides—that she was going to miss the man, too. He had treated her as a man would like other men to treat his sister, with a respect and deference that she had never met with in the City of Angels.

Three weeks had passed. She had drawn out the week's supply that Crumb had doled out to her to this length, and there was even enough for another week, to such small quantities had she reduced the doses, and to such lengths had she increased the intervals between them. She had gone two whole days without it; yet she did not once

think that she could give it up entirely, for when the craving came in full force she was still powerless to withstand it, and she knew that she would always be so.

Without realizing it, she was building up a reserve force of health that was to be her strongest ally in the battles to come. The sallowness had left her; her cheeks were tanned and ruddy; her eyes sparkled with the old fire, and were no longer wild and staring. She could ride and walk and swim and dance with the best of them. She found interest in the work of her orchard, where she went almost daily to talk with the caretaker, to question him and to learn all that she could of citrus culture. She even learned to drive the light tractor and steer it in and out about the trees without barking them.

Every day that she was there she went to the sunny bedroom in the bungalow—the bedroom that had been her mother's—and knelt beside the bed and poured forth her heart in blind faith that her mother heard. She did not grieve, for she held that sublime faith in the hereafter which many profess and few possess—the faith which taught her that her mother was happier than she had ever been before. Her sorrow had been in her own loss, and this she fought down as selfishness. She realized that her greatest anguish lay in vain regrets; and such thoughts she sought to stifle, knowing their uselessness.

Sometimes she prayed there—prayed for strength to cast off the bonds of her servitude. Ineffectual prayers she knew them to be, for the only power that could free her had lain within herself, and that power the drug had undermined and permanently weakened. Her will had degenerated to impotent wishes.

And now the time had come when she must definitely set a date for her departure. She had determined to retain the orchard, not alone because she had seen that it would prove profitable, but because it would always constitute a link between her and the people whom she had come to love. No matter what the future held, she could always feel that a part of her remained here, where she would that all of her might be; but she knew that she must go, and she determined to tell them on the following day that she would return to the city within the week.

It was going to be hard to announce her decision, for she was not blind to the fact that they had grown fond of her, and that her presence meant much to Eva, who, since Grace's departure, had greatly missed the companionship of a girl near her own age. Mrs. Pennington and the colonel had been a mother and father to her, and Custer a big brother and a most charming companion.

She passed that night without recourse to the white powders, for she must be frugal of them if they were to last through the week. The next morning she rode with the Penningtons and the Evanses as usual. She would tell them at breakfast.

When she came to the table she found a pair of silver spurs beside her plate, and when she looked about in astonishment they were all smiling.

"For me?" she cried.

"From the Penningtons," said the colonel. "You've won 'em, my dear. You ride like a trooper already."

The girl choked, and the tears came to her eyes.

"You are all so lovely to me!" she said. Walking around the table to the colonel, she put her arms about his neck, and, standing on tiptoe, kissed his cheek. "How can I ever thank you?"

"You don't have to, child. The spurs are nothing."

"They are everything to me. They are a badge of honor that — that — I don't deserve!"

"But you do deserve them. You wouldn't have got them if you hadn't. We might have given you something else—a vanity case or a book, perhaps; but no one gets spurs from the Penningtons who does not *belong*."

After that she simply couldn't tell them then that she was going away. She would wait until to-morrow; but she laid her plans without reference to the hand of fate.

That afternoon, immediately after luncheon, they were all seated in the patio, lazily discussing the chief topic of thought—the heat. It was one of those sultry days that are really unusual in southern California. The heat was absolutely oppressive, and even beneath the canvas canopy that shaded the patio there was little relief.

"I don't know why we sit here," said Custer. "It's cooler in the house. This is the hottest place on the ranch a day like this!"

"Wouldn't it be nice under one of those oaks up the cañon?" suggested Shannon.

He looked at her and smiled.

"Phew! It's too hot even to think of getting there."

"*That* from a Pennington!" she cried in mock astonishment and reproach.

"Do you mean to say that you'd ride up there through this heat?" he demanded.

"Of course I would. I haven't christened my new spurs yet."

"I'm game, then, if you are," Custer announced.

She jumped to her feet.

"Come on, then! Who else is going?"

Shannon looked around at them questioningly. Mrs. Pennington shook her head, smiling.

"Not I. Before breakfast is enough for me in the summer time."

"I have to dictate some letters," said the colonel.

"And I suppose little Eva has to stay home and powder her nose," suggested Custer, grinning at his sister.

"Little Eva is going to drive over to Ganado with Guy Thackeray Evans, the famous author," said the girl. "He expects an express package—his story's coming back again. Horrid, stupid old editors! They don't know a real story when they see one. I'm in it—Guy put me in. You all ought to read it—oh, it's simply radiant! I'm *Hortense*—tall and willowy and very dignified—"

"Yes, that's you, unmistakably," said Custer. "Tall and willowy and very dignified—Guy's some hot baby at character delineation!"

Eva ignored the interruption.

"I swoon when the villain enters my room and carries me off. Then the hero—he's *Bruce Bellinghame,* tall and slender, with curly hair—"

"Is he very dignified, too?"

"And then the hero pursues and rescues me just as the villain is going to hurl me off a cliff—oh, it's gorgeristic!"

"It must be," commented Custer.

"You're horrid," said Eva. "You ought to have been an editor."

"Tall and slender, with curly hair," gibed Custer. "Or was it tall and curly, with slender hair? Come on, Shannon! I see where we are the only real sports in the family."

"Hot sports is what you're going to be!" Eva called after them.

"The only real sports in the family—in the family!" The words thrilled her. They had taken her in—they had made her a part of their life. It was wonderful. Oh, God, if it could only last forever!

It was very hot. The dust rose from the shuffling feet of their horses. Even the Apache shuffled to-day. His head was low, and he did not dance. The dust settled on sweating neck and flank, and filled the eyes of the riders.

"Lovely day for a ride," commented Custer.

"But think how nice it will be under the oak," she reminded him.

"I'm trying to."

Suddenly he raised his head as his wandering eyes sighted a slender column of smoke rising from behind the ridge beyond Jackknife Cañon. He reined in the Apache.

"Fire!" he said to the girl. "Wait here. I'll notify the boys, and then we'll ride on ahead and have a look at it. It may not amount to anything."

He wheeled about and was off at a run—the heat and the dust forgotten. She watched him go, erect in the saddle, swinging easily with every motion of his mount—a part of the horse. In less than five minutes he was back.

"Come on!" he cried.

She swung Baldy in beside the Apache, and they were off. The loose stones clattered from the iron hoofs, the dust rose far behind them now, and they had forgotten the heat. A short cut crossed a narrow wash that meant a jump.

"Grab the horn!" he cried to her. "Give him his head!"

They went over almost stirrup to stirrup, and he smiled broadly, for she had not grabbed the horn. She had taken the jump like a veteran.

She thrilled with the excitement of the pace. The horses flattened out—their backs seemed to vibrate in a constant plane—it was like flying. The hot wind blew in her face and choked her; but she laughed and wanted to shout aloud and swing a hat.

More slowly they climbed the side of Jackknife, and just beyond the ridge they saw the flames leaping in a narrow ravine below them. Fortunately there was no wind—no more than what the fire itself was making; but it was burning fiercely in thick brush.

"There isn't a thing to do," he told her, "till the boys come with the teams and plows and shovels. It's in a mean place—

too steep to plow, and heavy brush; but we've got to stop it!"

Presently the "boys"—a wagon full of them—came with four horses, two walking plows, shovels, a barrel of water, and burlap sacks. They were of all ages, from eighteen to seventy. Some of them had been twenty years on the ranch, and had fought many a fire. They did not have to be told what to bring or what to do with what they brought.

The wagon had to be left in Jackknife Cañon. The horses dragged the plows to the ridge, and the men carried the shovels and wet burlaps and buckets of water from the barrel. Custer dismounted and turned the Apache over to an old man to hold.

"Plow down the east side of the ravine. Try to get all the way around the south side of the fire and then back again," he directed the two men with one of the teams. "I'll take the other, with Jake, and we'll try to cut her off across the top here!"

"You can't do it, Cus," said one of the older men. "It's too steep."

"We've got to try it," said Pennington. "Otherwise we'd have to go back so far that it would get away from us on the east side before we made the circle. Jake, you choke the plow handles—I'll drive!"

Jake was a short, stocky, red-headed boy of twenty, with shoulders like a bull. He grinned good-naturedly.

"I'll choke the tar out of 'em!" he said.

"The rest of you shovel and beat like hell!" ordered Custer.

Shannon watched him as he took the reins and started the team forward, slowly, quietly. There was no yelling. They were horsemen, these men of Ganado. The great Percherons moved ponderously forward. The plow point bit deep into the earth, but the huge beasts walked on as if dragging an empty wagon.

When the girl saw where Custer was guiding them she held her breath. No, she must be mistaken! He would turn them up toward the ridge. He could not be thinking of trying to drive them across the steep, shelving side of the ravine!

But he was. They slipped and caught themselves. Directly below them the burning brush had become a fiery furnace. If ever they failed to catch themselves, nothing could save them from that hell of heat.

Jake, clinging to the plow handles, stumbled and slid, but the plow steadied him, and the furrow saved his footing a dozen times in as many yards. Custer, driving, walked just below the plow. How he kept the team going was a miracle to the girl.

The steep sides of the ravine seemed almost perpendicular in places, with footing fit only for a goat. How those heavy horses clung there was beyond her. Only implicit confidence in these men of Ganado, who had handled them from the time they were foaled, and great courage, could account for it.

What splendid animals they were! The crackling of burning brush, the roaring of the flames, the almost unbearable heat that swept up to them from below, must have been terrifying; and yet only by occasional nervous side glances and uppricked ears did they acknowledge their instinctive fear of fire.

At first it had seemed to Shannon a mad thing to attempt, but as she watched and realized what Custer sought to accomplish, she understood the wisdom of it. If he could check the flames here with a couple of furrows, he might gain time to stop its eastward progress to the broad pastures filled with the tinder-dry grasses and brush of late August.

Already some of the men were working with shovels, just above the furrow that the plow was running, clearing away the brush and throwing it back. Shannon watched these men, and there was not a shirker among them. They worked between the fierce heat of the sun and the fierce heat of the fire, each one of them as if he owned the ranch. It was a fine proof of loyalty; and she saw an indication of the reason for it in Custer's act when he turned the Apache over to the oldest man, in order that the veteran might not be called upon to do work beyond his strength, while young Pennington himself undertook a dangerous and difficult part in the battle.

The sight thrilled her; and beside this picture she saw Wilson Crumb directing a Western scene, sending mounted men over a steep cliff, while he sat in safety beside the camera man, hurling taunts and insults at the poor devils who risked their lives for five dollars a day. He had killed one horse that time and sent two men to hospital, badly injured—and the next day he had bragged about it!

Now they were across the ravine and moving along the east side on safer footing. Shannon realized the tension that had been upon her nerves when reaction followed the

lessening of the strain—she felt limp and fagged.

The smoke hid them from her occasionally, as it rose in cloudlike puffs. Then there would be a break in it, and she would see the black coats of the Percherons and the figures of the sweating men. They rounded well down the east side of the ravine and then turned back again; for the other team, with easier going, would soon be up on that side to join its furrow with theirs. They were running the second furrow just above the first, and this time the work seemed safer, for the horses had the first furrow below them should they slip—a ridge of loose earth that would give them footing.

They were more than halfway back when it happened. The off horse must have stepped upon a loose stone, so suddenly did he lurch to the left, striking the shoulder of his mate just as the latter had planted his left forefoot. The ton of weight hurled against the shoulder of the near horse threw him downward against the furrow. He tried to catch himself on his right foot, crossed his forelegs, stumbled over the ridge of newly turned earth, and rolled down the hill, dragging his mate and the plow after him toward the burning brush below.

Jake at the plow handles and Custer on the lines tried to check the horses' fall, but both were jerked from their hands, and the two Percherons rolled over and over into the burning brush. A groan of dismay went up from the men. It was with difficulty that Shannon stifled a scream; and then her heart stood still as she saw Custer Pennington leap deliberately down the hillside, drawing the long, heavy trail-cutting knife that he always wore on the belt with his gun.

The horses were struggling and floundering to gain their feet. One of them was screaming with pain. The girl wanted to cover her eyes with her palms to shut out the heart-rending sight, but she could not take them from the figure of the man.

She saw that the upper horse was so entangled with the harness and the plow that he could not rise, and that he was holding the other down. Then she saw the man leap into the midst of the struggling, terrified mass of horseflesh, seeking to cut the beasts loose from the tangled traces and the plow. It seemed impossible that he could escape the flying hoofs or the tongued flames that licked upward as if in hungry greed to seize this new prey.

As Shannon watched, a great light awoke within her, suddenly revealing the unsuspected existence of a wondrous thing that had come into her life—a thing which a moment later dragged her from her saddle and sent her stumbling down the hill into the burning ravine, to the side of Custer Pennington.

He had cut one horse free, seized its headstall, dragged it to its feet, and then started it scrambling up the hill. As he was returning to the other, the animal struggled up, crazed with terror and pain, and bolted after its mate. Pennington was directly in its path on the steep hillside. He tried to leap aside, but the horse struck him with its shoulder, hurling him to the ground, and before he could stop his fall he was at the edge of the burning brush, stunned and helpless.

Every man of them who saw the accident leaped down the hillside to save him from the flames; but quick as they were, Shannon Burke was first at his side, vainly endeavoring to drag him to safety. An instant later strong hands seized both Custer and Shannon and helped them up the steep acclivity, for Pennington had already regained consciousness, and it was not necessary to carry him.

Custer was badly burned, but his first thought was for the girl, and his next, when he found she was uninjured, for the horses. They had run for only a short distance, and were standing on the ridge above Jackknife, where one of the men had caught them. One was burned about the neck and shoulder; the other had a bad cut above the hock, where he had struck the plow point in his struggles.

"Take them in and take care of those wounds, Jake," said Pennington, after examining them. "You go along," he told another of the men, "and bring out Dick and Dave. I don't like to risk them in this work, but none of the colts are steady enough for this."

Then he turned to Shannon.

"Why did you go down into that?" he asked. "You shouldn't have done it—with all the men here."

"I couldn't help it," she said. "I thought you were going to be killed."

Custer looked at her searchingly for a moment.

"It was a very brave thing to do," he

said, " and a very foolish thing. You might have been badly burned."

" Never mind that," she said. " *You* have been badly burned, and you must go to the house at once. Do you think you can ride?"

He laughed.

" I'm all right," he said. " I've got to stay here and fight this fire."

" You are not going to do anything of the kind." She turned and called to the man who held Pennington's horse. " Please bring the Apache over here," she said. " These men can fight the fire without you," she told Custer. " You are going right back with me. You've never seen any one badly burned, or you'd know how necessary it is to take care of your burns at once."

He was not accustomed to being ordered about, and it amused him. Grace would never have thought of questioning his judgment in this or any other matter; but this girl's attitude implied that she considered his judgment faulty and his decisions of no consequence. She evidently had the courage of her convictions, for she caught up her own horse and rode over to the men, who had resumed their work, to tell them that Custer was too badly burned to remain with them.

" I told him that he must go back to the house and have his burns dressed; but he doesn't want to. Maybe he would pay more attention to you, if you told him."

" Sure, we'll tell him," cried one of them. " Here comes the colonel now. He'll make him go, if it's necessary."

Colonel Pennington reined in a dripping horse beside his son, and Shannon rode over to them. Custer was telling him about the accident to the team.

" Burned, was he?" exclaimed the colonel. " Why, damn it, man, *you're* burned!"

" It's nothing," replied the younger man.

" It *is* something, colonel," cried Shannon. " Please make him go back to the house. He won't pay any attention to me, and he ought to be cared for right away. He should have a doctor just as quickly as we can get one."

" Can you ride?" snapped the colonel. at Custer.

" Of course I can ride!"

" Then get out of here and take care of yourself. Will you go with him, Shannon? Have them call Dr. Baldwin."

His rough manner did not conceal the father's concern, or his deep love for his boy. That he could be as gentle as a woman was evidenced, when he dismounted, in the way that he helped Custer to his saddle.

" Take care of him, my dear," he said to Shannon. " I'll stay here and help the boys. Ask Mrs. Pennington to send the car out with some iced water or lemonade for them. Take care of yourself, boy!" he called after them as they rode away.

As the horses moved slowly along the dusty trail, Shannon, riding a pace behind the man, watched his profile for signs of the pain that she knew he must be suffering. Once, when he winced, she almost gave a little cry, as if it had been she who was tortured. They were riding very close, and she laid her hand gently upon his right arm, in sympathy.

" I am so sorry!" she said. " I know it must pain you terribly."

He turned to her with a smile on his face, now white and drawn.

" It does hurt a little now," he said.

" And you did it to save those two dumb brutes. I think it was magnificent, Custer!"

He looked at her in mild surprise.

" What was there magnificent about it? It was my duty. My father has always taught me that the ownership of animals entails certain moral obligations which no honorable man can ignore—that it isn't sufficient merely to own them, and feed them, and house them; but to serve and protect them, even if it entailed sacrifices to do so."

" I don't believe he meant that you should give your life for them," she said.

" No, of course not; but I am not giving my life."

" You might have."

" I really didn't think there would be any danger to me," he said. " I guess I didn't think anything about it. I saw those two beautiful animals, who had been working there for me so bravely, helpless at the edge of that fire, and I couldn't have helped doing what I did under any circumstances. You don't know, Shannon, how we Penningtons love our horses. It's been bred in the bone for generations. Perhaps it's silly; but we don't think so."

" Neither do I. It's fine!"

By the time they reached the house she could see that the man was suffering excruciating pain. The stableman had gone to help the fire fighters, as had every able-

bodied man on the ranch, so that she had to help Custer from the Apache. After tying the two horses at the stable, she put an arm about him and assisted him up the long flight of steps to the house. There Mrs. Pennington and Hannah came at her call and took him to his room, while she ran to the office to telephone for the doctor.

When she returned, they had Custer undressed and in bed, and were giving such first aid as they could. She stood in the doorway for a moment, watching him, as he fought to hide the agony he was enduring. He rolled his head slowly from side to side, as his mother and Hannah worked over him; but he stifled even a faint moan, though Shannon knew that his tortured body must be goading him to screams. He opened his eyes and saw her, and tried to smile.

Mrs. Pennington turned then and discovered her.

"Please let me do something, Mrs. Pennington, if there is anything I can do."

"I guess we can't do much until the doctor comes. If we only had something to quiet the pain until then!"

If they only had something to quiet the pain! The horror of it! She had something that would quiet the pain; but at what a frightful cost to herself must she divulge it! They would know, then, the sordid story of her vice. There could be no other explanation of her having such an outfit in her possession. How they would loathe her! To see disgust in the eyes of these friends, whose good opinion was her one cherished longing, seemed a punishment too great to bear.

And then there was the realization of that new force that had entered her life with the knowledge that she loved Custer Pennington. It was a hopeless love, she knew; but she might at least have had the happiness of knowing that he respected her. Was she to be spared nothing? Was her sin to deprive her of even the respect of the man whom she loved?

She saw him lying there, and saw the muscles of his jaws tensing as he battled to conceal his pain; and then she turned and ran up the stairway to her rooms. She did not hesitate again, but went directly to her bag, unlocked it, and took out the little black case. Carefully she dissolved a little of the white powder—a fraction of what she could have taken without danger of serious results, but enough to allay his suffering until the doctor came. She knew that this was the end—that she might not remain under that roof another night.

She drew the liquid through the needle into the glass barrel of the syringe, wrapped it in her handkerchief, and descended the stairs. She felt as if she moved in a dream. She felt that she was not Shannon Burke at all, but another whom Shannon Burke watched with pitying eyes; for it did not seem possible that she could enter that room and before his eyes and Mrs. Pennington's and Hannah's reveal the thing that she carried in her handkerchief.

Ah, the pity of it! To realize her first love, and in the same hour to slay the respect of its object with her own hand! Yet she entered the room with brave step, fearlessly. Had he not risked his life for the two dumb brutes he loved? Could she be less courageous? Perhaps, though, she was braver, for she was knowingly surrendering what was dearer to her than life.

Mrs. Pennington turned toward her as she entered.

"He has fainted," she said. "My poor boy!"

Tears stood in his mother's eyes.

"He is not suffering, then?" asked Shannon, trembling.

"Not now. For his sake, I hope he won't recover consciousness until after the doctor comes."

Shannon Burke staggered and would have fallen had she not grasped the frame of the door.

It was not long before the doctor came, and then she went back up the stairs to her rooms, still trembling. She took the filled hypodermic syringe from her handkerchief and looked at it. Then she carried it into the bathroom.

"You can never tempt me again," she said aloud, as she emptied its contents into the lavatory. "Oh, dear God, I love him!"

XVII

THAT night Shannon insisted upon taking her turn at Custer's bedside, and she was so determined that they could not refuse her. He was still suffering, but not so acutely. The doctor had left morphine, with explicit directions for its administration should it be required. The burns, while numerous, and reaching from his left ankle to his cheek, were superficial, and, though painful, not necessarily dangerous.

He slept but little, and when he was

awake he wanted to talk. He told her about Grace. It was his first confidence—a sweetly sad one—for he was a reticent man concerning those things that were nearest his heart and consequently the most sacred to him. He had not heard from Grace for some time, and her mother had had but one letter—a letter that had not sounded like Grace at all. They were anxious about her.

"I wish she would come home!" he said wistfully. "You would like her, Shannon. We could have such bully times together! I think I would be content here if Grace were back; but without her it seems very different, and very lonely. You know we have always been together, all of us, since we were children—Grace, Eva, Guy, and I; and now that you are here it would be all the better, for you are just like us. You seem like us, at least—as if you had always lived here, too."

"It's nice to have you say that; but I haven't always been here, and, really, you know I don't *belong*."

"But you do belong!"

"And I'm going away again pretty soon. I must go back to the city."

"Please don't go back," he begged. "You don't really have to, do you?"

"I had intended telling you all this morning; but after the spurs, I couldn't."

"Do you *really* have to go?" Custer insisted.

"I don't have to, but I think I ought to. Do you want me to stay—honestly?"

"Honest Injun!" he said, smiling.

"Maybe I will."

He reached over with his right hand and took hers.

"Oh, will you?" he exclaimed. "You don't know how much we want you—all of us."

It was precisely what he might have done or said to Eva in boyish affection and comradeship.

"I'm going to stay," she announced. "I've made up my mind. As soon as you are well I'm going to move down to my own place and really learn to work it. I'd love it!"

"And I'll come down and help you with what little I know about oranges. Father will, too. We don't know much — citrus growing is a little out of our line, though we have a small orchard here; but we'll give you the best we've got. And it 'll be fine for Eva—she loves you. She cried the other day—the last time you mentioned in earnest that you might not stay."

"She's a dear!"

"She is all of that," he said. "We have always had our fights—I suppose all brothers and sisters do—and we kid one another a lot; but there never was a sister like Eva. Just let any one else say anything against me! They'd have a fight on their hands right there, if Eva was around. And sunshine! The old place seems like a morgue every time she goes away."

"She worships you, Custer."

"She's a brick!"

He could have voiced no higher praise.

He asked about the fire, and especially about the horses. He was delighted when she told him that a man had just come down to say that the fire was practically out, and the colonel was coming in shortly; and that the veterinary had been there and found the team not seriously injured.

"I think that fire was incendiary," he said; "but now that Slick Allen is in jail, I don't know who would set it."

"Who is Slick Allen," she asked, "and why should he want to set fire to Ganado?"

He told her, and she was silent for a while, thinking about Allen and the last time she had seen him. She wondered what he would do when he got out of jail. She would hate to be in Wilson Crumb's boots then, for she guessed that Allen was a hard character.

While she was thinking of Allen, Custer mentioned Guy Evans. Instantly there came to her mind, for the first time since that last evening at the Vista del Paso bungalow, Crumb's conversation with Allen and the latter's account of the disposition of the stolen whisky. His very words returned to her:

"Got a young high-blood at the edge of the valley handling it—a fellow by the name of Evans."

She had not connected Allen or that conversation or the Evans he had mentioned with these people; but now she knew that it was Guy Evans who was disposing of the stolen liquor. She wondered if Allen would return to this part of the country after he was released from jail. If he did, and saw her, he would be sure to recognize her, for he must have had her features impressed upon his memory by the fact that she so resembled some one he had known.

If he recognized her, would he expose her? She did not doubt but that he would.

The chances were that he would attempt to blackmail her; but, worst of all, he might tell Crumb where she was. That was the thing she dreaded most—seeing Wilson Crumb again, or having him discover her whereabouts; for she knew that he would leave no stone unturned, and hesitate to stoop to no dishonorable act, to get her back again. She shuddered when she thought of him—a man whose love, even, was a dishonorable and dishonoring thing.

Then she turned her eyes to the face of the man lying there on the bed beside which she sat. He would never love her; but her love for him had already ennobled her.

If the people of her old life did not discover her hiding place, she could remain here on her little grove, near Ganado, and see Custer often—nearly every day. He would not guess her love—no one would guess it; but she should be happy just to be near him. Even if Grace returned, it would make no difference — not even if Grace and Custer were married. Shannon knew that he was not for her—no honorable man was for her, after what she had been—but there was no moral law to be transgressed by her secret love for him.

She felt no jealousy of Grace. He belonged to Grace, and even had she thought she might win him she would not have attempted it, for she had always held in contempt those who infringed selfishly upon settled affections. It would be hard for her, of course, when Grace returned; but she was determined to like her, even to love her. She would be untrue to this new love that had transfigured her should she fail to love what *he* loved.

Custer moved restlessly. Again he was giving evidence of suffering. She laid a cool palm upon his forehead, and stroked it. He opened his eyes and smiled up at her.

"It's bully of you to sit with me," he said; "but you ought to be in bed. You've had a pretty hard day, and you're not as used to it as we are."

"I am not tired," she said, "and I should like to stay—if you would like to have me."

He took her hand from his forehead and kissed it.

"Of course I like to have you here, Shannon — you're just like a sister. It's funny, isn't it, that we should all feel that way about you, when we've only known you a few weeks? It must have been because of the way you fitted in. You belonged right from the start—you were just like us."

She turned her head away suddenly, casting her eyes upon the floor and biting her lip to keep back the tears.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I am not like you, Custer; but I have tried hard to be."

"Why aren't you like us?" he demanded.

"I—why, I—couldn't ride a horse," she explained lamely.

"Don't make me laugh, please; my face is burned," he pleaded in mock irony. "Do you think that's all we know, or think of, or possess—our horsemanship? We have hearts, and minds, such as they are—and souls, I hope. It was of these things that I was thinking. I was thinking, too, that we Penningtons demand a higher standard in women than is customary nowadays. We are a little old-fashioned, I guess. We want the blood of our horses and the minds of our women pure. Here is a case in point —I can tell you, because you don't know the girl and never will. She was the daughter of a friend of Cousin William—our New York cousin. She was spending the winter in Pasadena, and we had her out here on Cousin William's account. She was a pippin of a looker, and I suppose she was all right morally; but she didn't have a clean mind. I discovered it about the first time I talked with her alone; and then Eva asked me a question about something that she couldn't have known about at all except through this girl. I didn't know what to do. She was a girl, and so I couldn't talk about her to any one, not even my father or mother; but I didn't want her around Eva. I wondered if I was just a narrow prig, and if, after all, there was nothing that any one need take exception to in the girl. I got to analyzing the thing, and I came to the conclusion that I would be ashamed of mother and Eva if they talked or thought along such lines. Consequently, it wasn't right to expose Eva to that influence. That was what I decided, and I don't just *think* I was right—I *know* I was."

"And what did you do?" Shannon asked, in a very small voice.

"I did what under any other circumstances would have been unpardonable. I went to the girl and asked her to make some excuse that would terminate her visit.

It was a very hard thing to do; but I would do more than that—I would sacrifice my most cherished friendship—for Eva."

"And the girl—did you tell her why you asked her to go?"

"I didn't want to, but she insisted, and I told her."

"Did she understand?"

"She did not."

They were silent for some time.

"Do you think I did wrong?" he asked.

"No. There is mental virtue as well as physical. It is as much your duty to protect your sister's mind as to protect her body."

"I knew you'd think as I do about it; but let me tell you it was an awful jolt to the cherished Pennington hospitality. I hope I never have to do it again!"

"I hope you never do."

He commenced to show increasing signs of suffering, presently, and then he asked for morphine.

"I don't want to take it unless I have to," he explained.

"No," she said, "do not take it unless you have to."

She prepared and administered it, but she felt no desire for it herself. Then Eva came to relieve her, and she bade them good night and went up to bed. She awoke about four o'clock in the morning, and immediately thought of the little black case; but she only smiled, turned over, and went back to sleep again.

XVIII

It was several weeks before Custer could ride again, and in the meantime Shannon had gone down to her own place to live. She came up every day on Baldy, who had been loaned to her until Custer should be able to select a horse for her. She insisted that she would own nothing but a Morgan, and that she wanted one of the Apache's brothers.

"You'll have to wait, then, until I can break one for you," Custer told her. "There are a couple of four-year-olds that are saddle broke and bridle wise in a way; but I wouldn't want you to ride either of them until they've had the finishing touches. I want to ride them enough to learn their faults, if they have any. In the meantime you just keep Baldy down there and use him. How's ranching? You look as if it agreed with you. Nobody'd know you for the same girl. You look like an Indian, and how your cheeks have filled out!"

The girl smiled happily.

"I never knew before what it was to live," she said. "I have never been sickly; but on the other hand I never *felt* health before, to know it as a tangible, enjoyable possession that one experienced and was conscious of every moment. People fill themselves with medicines, or drugs, or liquors, to induce temporarily a poor imitation of what they might enjoy constantly if they only would. A man who thinks that a drink is the only thing that can make one feel like shouting and waving one's hat should throw a leg over one of your Morgans before breakfast one of these cool September mornings, and give him his head and let him go. Oh, *boy!*" she cried. "*There's* intoxication for you!"

Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes dancing. She was a picture of life and health and happiness; and Custer's eyes were sparkling, too.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "You're a regular Pennington!"

"I wish I were!" the girl thought to herself. "You honor me," was what she said aloud.

Custer laughed.

"That sounded rotten, didn't it? But you know what I meant—it's nice to have people whom we like like the same things we do. It doesn't necessarily mean that we think our likes are the best in the world. I didn't mean to be egotistical."

Eva had just entered the patio.

"Listen to him, the radiant child!" she exclaimed. "Do you know, Shannon, that dear little brother just hates himself!"

She walked over and perched on his knee and kissed him.

"Yes," said Custer, "brother hates himself. He spends hours powdering his nose. Mother found a lip stick and an eyebrow pencil, or whatever you call it, in his dressing table recently; and when he goes to L. A. he has his eyebrows plucked."

Eva jumped from his knee and stamped her foot.

"I *never* had my eyebrows plucked!" she cried. "They're naturally this way."

"Why the excitement, little one? Did I say you did have them plucked?"

"Well, you tried to make Shannon think so. I got the lip stick and the other things so that if we have any amateur theatricals this winter I'll have them. Do you know,

I think I'll go on the stage or the screen—wouldn't it be splishous, though?—' Miss Eva Pennington is starring in the new and popular success based on the story by Guy Thackeray Evans, the eminent author!' "

" Eminent! He isn't even imminent," said Custer.

" Oh, Eva!" cried Shannon, genuine concern in her tone. " Surely you wouldn't *think* of the screen, would you? You're not serious?"

" Oh, yes," said Custer. " She's serious —serious is her middle name. To-morrow she will want to be a painter, and day after to-morrow the world's most celebrated harpist. Eva is nothing if not serious, while her tenacity of purpose is absolutely inspiring. Why, once, for one whole day, she wanted to do the same thing."

Eva was laughing with her brother and Shannon.

" If she were just like every one else, you wouldn't love your little sister any more," she said, running her fingers through his hair. " Honestly, ever since I met Wilson Crumb, I have thought I should like to be a movie star."

" Wilson Crumb!" exclaimed Shannon. " What do *you* know of Wilson Crumb?"

" Oh, I've met him," said Eva airily. " Don't you envy me?"

" What do you know about him, Shannon?" asked Custer. " Your tone indicated that you may have heard something about him that wasn't complimentary."

" No—I don't know him. It's only what I've heard. I don't think you'd like him." Shannon almost shuddered at the thought of this dear child even so much as knowing Wilson Crumb. " Oh, Eva!" she cried impulsively. " You mustn't even think of going into pictures. I lived in Los Angeles long enough to learn that the life is oftentimes a hard one, filled with disappointment, disillusionment, and regrets — principally regrets."

" And Grace is there now," said Custer in a low voice.

" Can't you persuade her to return?"

He shook his head.

" It wouldn't be fair," he said. " She is trying to succeed, and we ought to encourage her. It is probably hard enough for her at best, without all of us suggesting antagonism to her ambition by constantly urging her to abandon it, so we try to keep our letters cheerful."

" Have you been to see her since she left? No, I know you haven't. If I were you, I'd run down to L. A. It might mean a lot to her, Custer; it might mean more than you can guess."

The girl spoke from a full measure of bitter experience. She realized what it might have meant to her had there been some man like this to come to her when she had needed the strong arm of a clean love to drag her from the verge of the mire. She would have gone away with such a man—gone back home, and thanked God for the opportunity. If Grace loved Custer, and was encountering the malign forces that had arisen from their own corruption to claw at Shannon's skirts, she would come back with him.

On the other hand, should conditions be what they ought to be, and what they are in some studios, Custer would return with a report that would lift a load from the hearts of all of them, while it left Grace encouraged and inspired by the active support of those most dear to her. What it would mean to Shannon, in either event, the girl did not consider. Her soul was above jealousy. She was prompted only by a desire to save another from the anguish she had endured, and to bring happiness to the man she loved.

" You really think I ought to go?" Custer asked. " You know she has insisted that none of us should come. She said she wanted to do it all on her own, without any help. Grace is not only very ambitious, but very proud. I'm afraid she might not like it."

" I wouldn't care what she liked," said Shannon. " Either you or Guy should run down there and see her. You are the two men most vitally interested in her. No girl should be left alone long in Hollywood without some one to whom she can look for the right sort of guidance and—and—protection."

" I believe I'll do it," said Custer. " I can't get away right now; but I'll run down there before I go on to Chicago with the show herds for the International."

It was shortly after this that Custer began to ride again, and Shannon usually rode with him. Unconsciously he had come to depend upon her companionship more and more. He had been drinking less on account of it, for it had broken a habit which he had been forming since Grace's departure—that of carrying a flask with him on his lonely rides through the hills.

As a small boy, it had been Custer's duty, as well as his pleasure, to "ride fence." He had continued the custom long after it might have been assigned to an employee, not only because it had meant long, pleasant hours in the saddle with Grace, but also to get first-hand knowledge of the condition of the pastures and the herds, as well as of the fences. During his enforced idleness, while recovering from his burns, the duty had devolved upon Jake.

On the first day that Custer took up the work again, Jake had called his attention to a matter that had long been a subject of discussion and conjecture on the part of the employees.

"There's something funny goin' on back in them hills," said Jake. "I've seen fresh signs every week of horses and burros comin' and goin'. Sometimes they trail through El Camino Largo and again through Corto, an' they've even been down through the old goat corral once, plumb through the ranch, an' out the west gate. But what I can't tell for sure is whether they come in an' go out, or go out an' come in. Whoever does it is foxy. Their two trails never cross, an' they must be made within a few hours of each other, for I'm not Injun enough to tell which is freshest—the one comin' to Ganado or the one goin' out. An' then they muss it up by draggin' brush, so it's hard to tell how many they be of 'em."

"They head for Jackknife, don't they?" asked Custer.

"Sometimes, an' sometimes they go straight up Sycamore, an' again they head in or out of half a dozen different little barrancos comin' down from the east; but sooner or later I lose 'em—can't never follow 'em no place in particular. Looks like as if they split up."

"Maybe it's only greasers from the valley coming up after firewood at night."

"Mebbe," said Jake; "but that don't sound reasonable."

"I know it doesn't; but I can't figure out what else it can be. I found a trail up above Jackknife last spring, and maybe that had something to do with it. I've sure got to follow that up. The trouble has been that it doesn't lead where the stock ever goes, and I haven't had time to look into it. Do you think they come up here regularly?"

"We got it doped out that it's always Friday nights. I see the tracks Saturday mornings, and some of the boys say they've heard 'em along around midnight a couple of times."

"What gates do they go out by?"

"They use all four of 'em at different times."

"H-m! Padlock all the gates to-morrow. This is Thursday. Then we'll see what happens."

They did see, for on the following Saturday, when Custer rode fence, he found it cut close by one of the padlocked gates—the gate that opened into the mouth of Horse Camp Cañon. Shannon was with him, and she was much excited at this evidence of mystery so close at home.

"What in the world do you suppose they can be doing?" she asked.

"I don't know; but it's something they shouldn't be doing, or they wouldn't go to so much pains to cover their tracks. They evidently passed in and out at this point, but they've brushed out their tracks on both sides, so that you can't tell which way they went last. Look here! On both sides of the fence the trail splits. It's hard to say which was made first, and where they passed through the fence. One track must have been on top of the other, but they've brushed it out."

He had dismounted, and was on his knees, examining the spoor beyond the fence.

"I believe," he said presently, "that the fresher trail is the one going toward the hills, although the other one is heavier. Here's a rabbit track that lies on top of the track of a horse's hoof pointed toward the valley, and over here a few yards the same rabbit track is obliterated by the track of horses and burros coming up from the valley. The rabbit must have come across here after they went down, stepping on top of their tracks, and when they came up again they crossed on top of his. That's pretty plain, isn't it?"

"Yes; but the tracks going down are much plainer than those going up. Wouldn't that indicate that they were fresher?"

"That's what I thought until I saw this evidence introduced by Brer Rabbit—and it's conclusive, too. Let's look along here a little farther. I have an idea that I have an idea."

"One of Eva's 'dapper little ideas,' perhaps!"

He bent close above first one trail and then another, following them down toward

the valley. Shannon walked beside him, leading Baldy. Sometimes, as they knelt above the evidence imprinted in the dusty soil, their shoulders touched. The contact thrilled the girl with sweet delight, and the fact that it left him cold did not sadden her. She knew that he was not for her. It was enough that she might be near him and love him. She did not want him to love her—that would have been the final tragedy of her life.

For the most part the trail was obliterated by brush, which seemed to have been dragged behind the last horse; but here and there was the imprint of the hoof of a horse, or, again, of a burro, so that the story that Custer pieced out was reasonably clear—as far as it went.

"I think I've got a line on it," he said presently. "Two men rode along here on horses. One horse was shod, the other was not. One rider went ahead, the other brought up the rear, and between them were several burros. Going down, the burros carried heavy loads; coming back, they carried nothing."

"How do you know all that?" she asked.

"I don't *know* it, but it seems the most logical deduction from these tracks. It is easy to tell the horse tracks from those of the burros, and to tell that there were at least two horses, because it is plain that a shod horse and an unshod horse passed along here. That one horse—the one with shoes—went first is evident from the fact that you always see the imprints of burro hoofs, or the hoof of an unshod horse, or both, superimposed on his. That the other horse brought up the rear is equally plain from the fact that no other tracks lie on top of his. Now, if you will look close, and compare several of these horse tracks, you will notice that there is little or no difference in the appearance of those leading into the valley and those leading out; but you can see that the burro tracks leading down are more deeply imprinted than those leading up. To me that means that those burros carried heavy loads down and came back light. How does it sound?"

"It's wonderful!" she exclaimed. "It is all that I can do to see that anything has been along here."

"It's not wonderful," he replied. "An experienced tracker would tell you how many horses there were, how many burros, how many hours had elapsed since they came down out of the hills, how many since they returned, and the names of the grandmothers of both riders."

Shannon laughed.

"I'm glad you're not an experienced tracker, then," she said, "for now I can believe what you have told me. And I still think it very wonderful, and very delightful, too, to be able to read stories—true stories—in the trampled dust where men and animals have passed."

"There is nothing very remarkable about it. Just look at the Apache's hoofprints, for instance. See how the hind differ from the fore."

Custer pointed to them as he spoke, calling attention to the fact that the Apache's hind shoes were squared off at the toe.

"And now compare them with Baldy's," he said. "See how different the two hoofprints are. Once you know them, you could never confuse one with the other. But the part of the story that would interest me most I can't read—who they are, what they were packing out of the hills on those burros, where they came from, and where they went. Let's follow down and see where they went in the valley. The trail must pass right by the Evanses' hay barn."

The Evanses' hay barn! A great light illuminated Shannon's memory. Allen had said, that last night at the bungalow, that the contraband whisky was hauled away on a truck, that it was concealed beneath hay, and that a young man named Evans handled it.

What was she to do? She dared not reveal this knowledge to Custer, because she could not explain how she came into possession of it. Nor, for the same reason, could she warn Guy Evans, had she thought that necessary—which she was sure it was not, since Custer would not expose him. She concluded that all she could do was to let events take their own course.

She followed Custer as he traced the partially obliterated tracks through a field of barley stubble. A hundred yards west of the hay barn the trail entered a macadam road at right angles, and there it disappeared. There was no telling whether the little caravan had turned east or west, for it left no spoor upon the hard surface of the paved road.

"Well, *Watson!*" said Custer, turning to her with a grin. "What do you make of this?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? *Watson,* I am surprised. Neither do I." He turned his horse back toward the cut fence. "There's no use looking any farther in this direction. I don't know that it's even worth while following the trail back into the hills, for the chances are that they have it well covered. What I'll do is to lay for them next Friday night. Maybe they're not up to any mischief, but it looks suspicious; and if they are, I'd rather catch them here with the goods than follow them up into the hills, where about all I'd accomplish would probably be to warn them that they were being watched. I'm sorry now I had those gates locked, for it will have put them on their guard. We'll just fix up this fence, and then we'll ride about and take all the locks off."

On the way home, an hour later, he asked Shannon not to say anything about their discovery or his plan to watch for the mysterious pack train the following Friday.

"It would only excite the folks needlessly," he explained. "The chances are that there'll be some simple explanation when I meet up with these people. As I told Jake, they may be greasers who work all the week and come up here at night for firewood. Still more likely, it's people who don't know they can get permission to gather deadwood for the asking, and think they are stealing it. Putting themselves to a lot of trouble for nothing, I'll say!"

"You'll not wait for them alone?" she asked, for she knew what he did not—that they were probably unscrupulous rascals who would not hesitate to commit any crime if they thought themselves in danger of discovery.

"Why not?" he asked. "I only want to ask them what they are doing on Ganado, and why they cut our fence."

"Please don't!" she begged. "You don't know who they are or what they have been doing. They might be very desperate men, for all we know."

"All right," he agreed. "I'll take Jake with me."

"Why don't you get Guy to go along, too?" she suggested, for she knew that he would be safer if Guy knew of his intention, since then there would be little likelihood of his meeting the men.

"No," he replied. "Guy would have to have a big camp fire, an easy chair, and a package of cigarettes if he was going to sit up that late out in the hills. Jake's the best for that sort of work."

"Guy isn't a bit like you, is he?" she asked. "He's lived right here and led the same sort of life, and yet he doesn't seem to be a part of it, as you are."

"Guy's a dreamer, and he likes to be comfortable all the time," laughed Custer. "They're all that way a little. Mr. Evans was, so father says. He died while we were all kids. Mrs. Evans likes to take it easy, too, and even Grace wasn't much on roughing it, though she could stand more than the others. None of them seemed to take to it the way you do. I never saw any one else but a Pennington such a glutton for a saddle and the outdoors as you are. I don't like 'em any the less for it," he hastened to add. "It's just the way people are, I guess. The taste for such things is inherited. The Evanses, up to this generation, all came from the city; the Penningtons all from the country. Father thinks that horsemen, if not the descendants of a distinct race, at least spring from some common ancestors who inhabited great plains and were the original stock raisers of the human race. He thinks they mingled with the hill and mountain people, who also became horsemen through them; but that the forest tribes and the maritime races were separate and distinct. It was the last who built the cities, which the horsemen came in from the plains and conquered."

"But perhaps Guy would like the adventure of it," she insisted. "It might give him material for a story. I'm going to ask him."

"Please don't. The less said about it the better, for if it's talked about it may get to the men I want to catch. Word travels fast in the country. Just as we don't know who these men are or what they are doing, neither do we know but what some of them may be on friendly terms with our employees, or the Evanses, or yours."

The girl made no reply.

"You won't mention it to him, please?" Custer insisted.

"Not if you don't wish it," she said.

They were silent for a time, each absorbed in his or her own thoughts. The girl was seeking to formulate some plan that would prevent a meeting between Custer and Allen's confederates, who she was sure were the owners of the mysterious pack train; while the man indulged in futile conjectures as to their identity and the purpose of their nocturnal expeditions.

"That trail above Jackknife Cañon is the key to the whole business," he declared presently. "I'll just lay low until after next Friday night, so as not to arouse their suspicions, and then, no matter what I find out, I'll ride that trail to its finish, if it takes me clear to the ocean!"

They had reached the fork in the road, one branch of which led down to Shannon's bungalow, the other to the Ganado saddle-horse stables.

"I thought you were coming up to lunch," said Custer, as Shannon reined her horse into the west road.

"Not to-day," she said. "I'll come to dinner, if I may, though."

"We all miss you when you're not there," he said.

"How nice! Now I'll surely come."

"And this afternoon—will you ride with me again?"

"I'm going to be very busy this afternoon," she replied.

His face dropped, and then, almost immediately, he laughed.

"I hadn't realized how much of your time I have been demanding. Why, you ride with me every day, and now when you want an afternoon off I start moping. I'm afraid you've spoiled me; but you mustn't let me be a nuisance."

"I ride with you because I like to," she replied. "I should miss our rides terribly if anything should occur to prevent them."

"Let's hope nothing will prevent them. I'm afraid I'd be lost without you now, Shannon. You can never know what it has meant to me to have you here. I was sort of going to pot after Grace left—blue and discouraged and discontented; and I was drinking too much. I don't mind telling you, because I know you'll understand—you seem to understand everything. Having you to ride with and talk to pulled me together. I owe you a lot, so don't let me impose on your friendship and your patience. Any time you want an afternoon off," he concluded, laughing, "don't be afraid to ask for it—I'll see that you get it with full pay!"

"I don't *want* any afternoons off, because I enjoy the rides as much as you, and they have meant even more to me. I intend to see that nothing prevents them, if I can."

She was touched and pleased with Custer's sudden burst of confidence, and thankful for whatever had betrayed him into one of those rare revelations of his heart. She wanted to be necessary to him, in the sweet and unemotional way of friendship, so that they might be together without embarrassment or constraint.

They had been standing at the fork, talking, and now, as she started Baldy again in the direction of her own place, Custer reined the Apache to accompany her.

"You needn't come down with me," she said. "It's nearly lunch time now, and it would only make you late."

"But I want to."

"No!" She shook her head. "You go right home."

"Please!"

"This is my afternoon off," she reminded him, "and I'd really rather you wouldn't."

"All right! I'll drive down in the car early, and we'll have a swim before dinner."

"Not too early—I'll telephone you when I'm ready. Good-by!"

He waved his hat as she cantered off, and then sat the Apache for a moment, watching her. How well she rode! What grace and ease in every motion of that supple body! He shook his head.

"Some girl, Shannon!" he mused aloud as he wheeled the Apache and rode toward the stables.

XIX

SHANNON BURKE did not ride to her home after she left Custer. She turned toward the west at the road above the Evans place, continued on to the mouth of Horse Camp Cañon, and entered the hills. For two miles she followed the cañon trail to El Camino Largo, and there, turning to the left, she followed this other trail east to Sycamore Cañon. Whatever her mission, it was evident that she did not wish it known to others. Had she not wished to conceal it, she might have ridden directly up Sycamore Cañon from Ganado with a saving of several miles.

Crossing Sycamore, she climbed the low hills skirting its eastern side. There was no trail here, and the brush was thick and oftentimes so dense that she was forced to make numerous detours to find a way upward; but at last she rode out upon the western rim of the basin meadow above Jackknife. Thence she picked her way down to more level ground, and, putting spurs to Baldy, galloped east, her eyes con-

stantly scanning the ground just ahead of her.

Presently she found what she sought—a trail running north and south across the basin. She turned Baldy into it, and headed him south toward the mountains. She was nervous and inwardly terrified, and a dozen times she would have turned back had she not been urged on by a power infinitely more potent than self-interest.

Personally, she had all to lose by this venture and naught to gain. The element of physical danger she knew to be far from inconsiderable, while it appalled her to contemplate the after effects, in the not inconceivable contingency of the discovery of her act by the Penningtons. Yet she urged Baldy steadily onward, though she felt her flesh creep as the trail entered a narrow barranco at the southern extremity of the meadow and wound upward through dense chaparral, which shut off her range of vision in all directions for more than a few feet.

At the upper end of the barranco the trail turned back and ascended a steep hillside, running diagonally upward through heavy brush—without which, she realized, the trail would have appeared an almost impossible one, since it clung to a nearly perpendicular cliff. The brush lent a suggestion of safety that was more apparent than real, and at the same time it hid the sheer descent below.

Baldy, digging his toes into the loose earth, scrambled upward, stepping over gnarled roots and an occasional bowlder, and finding, almost miraculously, the least precarious footing. There were times when the girl shut her eyes tightly and sat with tensed muscles, her knees pressing her horse's sides until her muscles ached. At last the doughty Morgan topped the summit of the hogback, and Shannon drew a deep breath of relief—which was alloyed, however, by the realization that in returning she must ride down this frightful trail, which now, as if by magic, disappeared.

The hogback was water-washed and gravel-strewn, and as hard-baked beneath the summer's sun as a macadam road. To Shannon's unaccustomed eyes it gave no clew as to the direction of the trail. She rode up and down in both directions until finally she discovered what appeared to be a trail leading downward into another barranco upon the opposite side of the ridge. The descent seemed less terrifying than that which she had just negotiated, and as it was the only indication of a trail that she could find, she determined to investigate it.

Baldy, descending carefully, suddenly paused and with uppricked ears emitted a shrill neigh. So sudden and so startling was the sound that Shannon's heart all but stood still, gripped by the cold fingers of terror. And then from below came an answering neigh.

She had found what she sought, but the fear that rode her all but sent her panic-stricken in retreat. It was only the fact that she could not turn Baldy upon that narrow trail that gave her sufficient pause to gain mastery over the chaos of her nerves and drive them again into the fold of reason. It required a supreme effort of will to urge her horse onward again, down into that mysterious ravine, where she knew there might lurk for her a thing more terrible than death. That she did it bespoke the greatness of the love that inspired her courage.

The ravine below her was both shallower and wider than that upon the opposite side of the ridge, so that it presented the appearance of a tiny basin. From her vantage point she looked out across the tops of spreading oaks to the brush-covered hillside that bounded the basin on the south; but what lay below, what the greenery of the trees concealed from her sight, she could only surmise.

She knew that the Penningtons kept no horses here, so she guessed that the animal that had answered Baldy's neigh belonged to the men she sought. Slowly she rode downward. What would her reception be? If her conclusions as to the identity of the men camped below were correct, she could imagine them shooting first and investigating later. The idea was not a pleasant one, but nothing could deter her now.

After what seemed a long time she rode out among splendid old oaks, in view of a soiled tent and a picket line where three horses and a half dozen burros were tethered. Nowhere was there sign of the actual presence of men, yet she had an uncanny feeling that they were there, and that from some place of concealment they were watching her.

She sat quietly upon her horse for a moment, waiting. Then, no one appearing, she called aloud.

"Hello, there! I want to speak with you."

Her voice sounded strange and uncanny in her ears.

For what seemed a long time there was no other sound than the gently moving leaves above her, the birds, and the heavy breathing of Baldy. Then, from the brush behind her, came another voice. It came from the direction of the trail down which she had ridden. She realized that she must have passed within a few feet of the man who now spoke.

"What do you want?"

"I have come to warn you. You are being watched."

"You mean you are not alone? There are others with you? Then tell them to go away, for we have our rifles. We have done nothing. We're tending our bees—they're just below the ridge above our camp."

"There is no one with me. I do not mean that others are watching you now, but that others know that you come down out of the hills with something each Friday night, and they want to find out what it is you bring."

There was a rustling in the brush behind her, and she turned to see a man emerge, carrying a rifle ready in his hands. He was a Mexican, swarthy and ill-favored, his face pitted by smallpox.

Almost immediately two other men stepped from the brush at other points about the camp. The three walked to where Shannon sat upon her mount. All were armed, and all were Mexicans.

"What do you know about what we bring out of the hills? Should we not bring our honey out?" asked the pock-marked one.

"I know what you bring out," she said. "I am not going to expose you. I am here to warn you."

"Why?"

"I know Allen."

Immediately their attitude changed.

"You have seen Allen? You bring a message from him?"

"I have not seen him. I bring no message from him; but for reasons of my own I have come to warn you not to bring down another load next Friday night."

(To be continued in the September number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

IF I WERE DEAD

If I were dead, my friends would come to-day
Remembering flowers on my breast to lay;
Yes, they would come, but you would stay away—
Though you would grieve, I think, you would not come!

And those about my bier would weep and tell
How grieved they were, how they had loved me well,
And how it pained them now to say farewell—
But you, yes, to the end you would be dumb!

You would not come, I think, lest others see
Your grief to see me lie there quietly;
You would not whisper, lest they hear, to me,
Nor bend to touch my lips there in the gloom.

Life has divided us—you silent go,
And if you love me, may not tell me so;
But I, if I were dead, perhaps might know,
And, knowing, lie there happy in that room.

But if the dead come back—some say they do—
And if you loved me, if I surely knew,
Death could not hold me, as life does, from you;
I would come back to you, back from the tomb!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery